

**Presentation on Protocol to
Queensland Association of Law Firm Marketers
Thursday 3 August 2006**

- Some people in the community think of protocol as being very strict and very formal. And there are times, and reasons, when it can be.
- But the underlying thought I'd like to convey tonight is that the application of good protocol is all about being sensible, having a framework and not being overwhelmed by a seeming mountain of rules and regulations.
- Today's presentation will include the following topics:-
 - What is protocol?
 - Why do we apply it?
 - The organisation of high level visits and meetings;
 - Official hospitality;
 - Cultural considerations; and
 - Indigenous protocols.
- To assist you in future, I've provided a number of handouts including:-
 - Some reference notes on tonight's discussion;
 - Handouts on the Forms of Address and the State Order of Precedence;
 - Publications on Queensland's State Emblems and the the Queensland Flag;
 - An outline of the responsibilities of Protocol Queensland.

What is protocol?

- Protocol is essentially the application of good etiquette and acceptable procedure.
- It's the business of ensuring that official visits, meetings, functions and activities are conducted in a way that is socially and culturally acceptable by the parties involved.
- Protocol originally evolved through showing respect to those in positions of authority including royalty, tribal elders, government officials and certain occupational groupings including the legal, medical, religious and military professions.

- Every country has their own particular customs and way of doing things. The common thread is that they are all based on showing respect for each other and to people in positions of authority.

Why do we apply protocol?

- Protocols are applied to develop and enhance good relationships, to show respect for positions of authority and thereby facilitate positive outcomes.
- It's hard to reach an agreement on any issue unless there is underlying relationship of goodwill and trust.
- In many ways, the application of good protocol is not always noticed, as it's something that's expected to occur.
- It's when you don't meet expectations that the lack of sound protocol is noticed.
- In such circumstances, one single occurrence can affect an entire relationship.
- Some of you will remember the international outcries when the Australian Prime Minister appeared to touch Her Majesty the Queen and to act in a way which was neither expected nor acceptable. Apart from the specific debate about the monarchy, the incident resulted in the broader questioning of Australia's relationship between Australia and the United Kingdom.
- Earlier this year, there was also an incident involving the President of the United States of America and the President of China.
 - The American Master of Ceremony announced that the national anthems of the Republic of China and the United States of America would be played. This was an enormous diplomatic mistake as the Republic of China is how people refer to Taiwan. Many countries, including Australia and the USA, adhere to the One China policy where Taiwan is considered part of the *People's Republic of China* and is not recognised as having a separate Government. This mistake, indeed offence, was reported around the world.
 - There were sixteen errors in the simultaneous interpretation of the speech by President Bush. The interpreter took more time than the President himself and every Chinese sentence contained grammatical errors and stuttering. The two sides should have provided their welcoming speeches to each other beforehand and used experienced interpreters.
 - During the speeches, there was a female protestor. She was able to disrupt proceedings for over two minutes before anyone stopped her. When the police came to take her away, they did not depart through the rear. Instead, she was taken away in front of the entire audience.
 - After the President of China finished his speech and was about to leave, President Bush touched him to steer him in the right direction. This

showed that the preparations for this visit had not been fully worked out.

- The list of mistakes was substantial, leading to reports of a breakdown in the relationship between the two countries.
- You can easily see how a series of fundamental mistakes can lead to a breakdown in a relationship.
- So the lesson from this is that protocol is about risk management, it's about meeting expectations and it's about attention to detail.

Organisation of VIP Meetings and Visits

In preparing to host a high level visit and meeting, the following check list may be useful in scoping and preparing for the visit. Note that the following points are guidelines and every situation will require some flexibility.

Delegation details

- Who is the VIP?
- How is his/her name pronounced and how should he/she be addressed? (Refer Attachment – Forms of Address)
- What position do they hold?
- Who else is in the entourage and what are their roles? This will assist in “matching” the meeting participants with local representatives and a range of planning issues such as seating arrangements.

Purpose of the Visit

- What is the purpose of the visit?
- What does the visitor want to discuss or see?
- What do you want, and not want, to discuss or show the delegation?
- In a time constrained visit, an outline Agenda may help.

Involvement of VIPs or Dignitaries

- Given the seniority of the Visitor, who are the appropriate attendees at the meeting?
- Is it likely the Governor, the Premier, or another Minister should be involved? This may be appropriate for a very high level visitor if there is an issue of importance (For advice, please contact Protocol Queensland on 3224 3694).
- Invitations to functions should be in writing. If a Minister attends, they should be acknowledged at the beginning of a speech (Refer to the Attachment on the State Order of Precedence for the order of acknowledgment, seating order etc).
- If you want a Minister to actively participate in an Order of Proceedings, you should write a letter of invitation, and then phone their Office.
- Most Ministerial Offices will have a protocol sheet to be completed. These sheets include:
 - venue information;
 - timings (such as arrival/departure);
 - who is doing the meeting and greeting;
 - other VIPs attending; and

- whether you wish the VIP to have a particular role or simply be a guest (either is usually fine).

Security

- The changed security environment in recent years has added a whole new dimension to event and meeting organisation
- It is imperative that security arrangements are in place which don't negatively impact on your VIPs and guests.
- While most people are accepting of security arrangements, it is always wise to notify VIPs and guests of any special security arrangements.
- Special security arrangements may need to be put in place that ease the impact on VIPs (for example scanning devices or separate entry points).
- If you have any major events with high profile dignitaries, please feel free to contact Protocol Queensland which can assist with providing contacts in the relevant State or Commonwealth Security Agencies.

Media

- Will the Media be interested in the VIP? If so, is this likely to be supportive or potentially embarrassing to the VIP? As hosting a VIP involves maintaining their dignity, what actions should be taken if there is media interest?

Greeting arrangements

- If the VIP is a high level dignitary, an officer should be waiting in the foyer of the building to escort the VIP to the meeting room. (If they are a VVIP and have specifically travelled to meet with your company, you may wish to arrange a car from the airport and/or hotel).
- The most senior person should be the first person to meet the delegation with other officials lined up in decreasing order of seniority to greet the VIP and their party.
- In a very formal situation and if there are large number of introductions, the most senior official should introduce the visitor to each of the local officials in line.
- If the delegation comprises representatives from several countries, never assume that a person is from a particular country and greet them in that language. Whilst such a gesture would be well intentioned, the delegate could actually be from a different country or be Australian born. Not only might your guest be offended, you could lose their respect. As a general rule, be polite and greet them in your usual manner in English.
- If there are many people to be introduced, palm cards may assist.

- When greeting the VIP, shake hands and introduce yourself. When shaking hands, remember not to do so too strongly, particularly when greeting non-western VIPs. Their hand shake is usually nothing more than a light momentary clasp of the hands. A bone-crunching jaw-clenching hand shake should be avoided.
- You should also be sensitive to any religious or cultural sensitivities eg. it is not usual for a Muslim woman to shake hands with a male although it is acceptable to shake hands with a female.

Business Cards

- Business cards should be exchanged at the time of meeting the visitor and their delegation.
- In general, two hands should be used to “present” the business card to the visitors. Upon receipt, you should pause to read the business card you are offered.

Seating arrangements

- The seating arrangement depends on the formality of the meeting, the number of attendees and your ability to rearrange furniture. The principle concern is that the most senior official and the visiting VIPs are central to any other attendees and can comfortably converse with each other.
- If it is a conference event with a number of speakers, a seating plan will ensure that VIPs are seated in the appropriate order.
- Different functions and different settings require appropriate measures.
- At a board table, the principals would usually sit opposite each other.
- At a more formal and larger meeting with Asian delegates, the principals would sit at the apex of a U-shaped arrangement of chairs with the respective Queensland and Asian delegates seated in order of seniority down either side of their relevant principal so that the most junior official is seated on the end (or in a row behind).
- In a smaller meeting, the interpreter would sit as part of the group. In a larger meeting or dinner, the interpreter would sit directly behind the person they are interpreting for.

Order of Precedence

- The State Order of Precedence can assist determine the speaking order and seating arrangements. The Order of Precedence identifies Government, diplomatic corps, religious, and judicial rankings.

Interpreters

- Do you need an interpreter? If so, Multicultural Affairs Queensland, Department of the Premier and Cabinet can provide advice - phone 3224 5006.

Order of Proceedings

- An appropriately senior representative should be the Master of Ceremonies, welcome the VIP and thank them.
- The VIP should be provided with an advance copy of the Order of Proceedings, indicating who is speaking, in what order and for how long.
- The organiser should request appropriate introductory notes about the speaker from the VIP.
- The organiser should ask the guest speaker whether they are happy to answer questions.
- Questions should be managed by the Master of Ceremonies with a time limit.
- Unless critically overtime, it is generally impolite to wind up a Guest Speaker. The best way to manage this is through prior notification of the time limits and/or a discrete tap of your watch or nod of your head.

Hospitality

- As a general rule, simple refreshments are appropriate. During the day, the VIP should be served a cup of tea, coffee or water and be offered some plain biscuits or individual plates of cut up fruit. (It's difficult to conduct a formal meeting with big cream cakes and some cultures and religions don't eat milk products). Whilst not absolutely necessary, jasmine tea or green tea is an appropriate gesture for Asian visitors.
- If having a meal, you should not be concerned about trying to provide the cuisine of the visitor's country. It's probable that the Australian version of a particular cuisine is quite different from the visitor's homeland.
- Fresh, simple Queensland cuisine is appreciated by most VIPs. You may wish to take the opportunity to showcase Queensland food and wine.
- You should also ask if there are any dietary requirements of the visitors. For example, they may be vegetarian, allergic to particular foods or Muslim (ie a believer in Islam). In the later situation, food should be halal (ie lawful or permitted). A strict Muslim will not eat animals that are carnivorous or scavenge (eg pigs, lobster, crabs etc), foods cooked in the oils of any of these animals or foods produced from these animals such as sausages or terrines. Animals need to be properly slaughtered and other foods should not be contaminated by unlawful foods. Strict Muslims will not drink alcohol or have it served. Less strict Muslims will allow alcohol to be served at the table. When in doubt, always ask ahead of time.

Flags

- You may wish to include desk flags at formal meetings – one of Queensland, and the other for the visitor's country. You will need to ensure however, that the correct flags are displayed to avoid any diplomatic incidents.
- At a recent meeting involving a senior Chinese VIP, the host organisation displayed the Vietnamese table flag instead of the Chinese. They are both red and have a yellow star. However the situation was made worse by removing

the flag before the eyes of the VIP as he sat with the flags in front of him. The organiser should have waited until the VIP got up to speak and then discretely removed the incorrect flag.

Gifts

- Visitors are likely to present a small gift and it is appropriate to reciprocate. Gifts should be token and not embarrass the recipient. You may wish to showcase Queensland or Australian gifts, including indigenous works. Gifts that can incorporate a plaque are often good eg. framed prints/photos of Queensland scenes or framed indigenous works by Queensland artists.

Photographs

- Photographers should be discrete, perhaps taking photographs on the arrival of the VIP and when initially seated. The exchange of gifts at the end of the meeting is another opportunity for photographs.

Moving a delegation

- When escorting, always lead off and invite the VIP to follow. Walk with the VIP or slightly ahead of them. You know where you're going - chances are they do not. You need to ensure that you don't get caught behind.
- When proceeding through a door, if the door opens away from you, go through first and hold the door until the VIPs are through. If the door opens towards you, hold it until the VIPs are through and proceed through immediately after them. If there is a large entourage, you may need to get someone else to hold the door so you can stay with the principal VIPs. Also for larger groups, don't worry about the accompanying officials. Look after the principal - the others will follow.

Other Cultures and Protocols

- As a general rule within Australia, Australian customs and rules of etiquette apply. However, this does not mean that we should not go some way towards accommodating those foreign guests with strongly held beliefs and customs. It is important that visitors are not offended at what they might perceive as a lack of respect.
- Many international VIPs, particularly those from western countries, will have a fairly good idea of the customs and business culture in Australia. However, those VIPs from non-western nations may not be so familiar with our ways.
- The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website – www.dfat.gov.au/geo/ contains a range of details on specific countries.

Indigenous Protocols should also be given consideration including:

- Indigenous representation;
- appropriate acknowledgment of the traditional owners where an event is taking place;
- affording the opportunity for a Welcome to Country if appropriate.

- The Welcome to Country, also known as the Traditional Welcome, allows the Traditional Owners to give their blessing for the event to take place on their land.
- Speakers acknowledging the traditional owners can use a general acknowledgment such as:
“I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which this event is taking place.”
- It may be possible to actually name the traditional owners but this should only be done after consultation with the nearest office of the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy.

Final Comment

Protocol is about discretely meeting expectations, appropriate behaviour, common sense and attention to detail.

At the same time, it's important not to let any unrealistic concern with protocol result in awkward moments.

Good forward planning and sound protocol arrangements provide a framework for the proceedings to flow easily.

Be courteous and natural - the legacy of the meeting should be a stronger relationship which can be used to transact further business.

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